

Reagan Asked to Intercede To Save Landsat Program

By Theresa M. Foley.

Washington—Top U. S. defense and intelligence officials have requested a meeting with President Reagan to discuss their concerns that the Landsat remote sensing program will be ended soon, a senior Defense Dept. official testified before Congress last week.

Donald Latham, assistant secretary of Defense for command, control, communications and intelligence, said Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger and acting Central Intelligence Agency Director Robert Gates have asked Reagan for a cabinet-level meeting on Landsat. Gates recently wrote National Security Council Director Frank Carlucci to call attention to Landsat problems, Latham said.

National Security

"The Landsat system will surely increase in its contribution to our national security—but only if it survives the series of difficulties caused by the process of commercialization," Latham said. He presented the subcommittees with two versions of his testimony—open and classified—explaining the importance of Landsat to the Defense Dept. (AW&ST Mar. 23, p. 62).

Latham was very supportive of continuing Landsat, but stopped short of endorsing a two-satellite system, calling only for the launch and operation of Landsat 6. Unless Reagan intercedes, the fate of Landsat will be left in the hands of the Office of Management and Budget, which has a long history of opposition to continued federal investment in the program.

OMB is considering a revised Landsat proposal that was received after the last OMB-approved plan, for a one-satellite system, was rejected by the Senate (AW&ST Feb. 9, p. 17). The Commerce Dept., which has responsibility for the Landsat program, wrote OMB Mar. 4 that only two Landsat options remain, approval of a two-satellite plan or termination of the program.

OMB policy has been that the private sector role in financing Landsat should be greater and that the federal government should not fund both follow-on satellites, even though that was part of the original agreement with Eosat. Congress, which supports the continuation of Landsat, is insisting on adherence to the two-satellite program mandated in the original contract.

A Landsat hearing before two House subcommittees last week, aimed at shedding some light on Landsat's future, left a "fog of confusion" around the future of the program, subcommittee members said. OMB Deputy Director Joseph R. Wright said the Administration continues to support Landsat commercialization, but that its benefits do not justify increased federal investment in the technology. "If Congress were to decide not to continue Landsat, I question whether the impact on the users would be significant," Wright said. The Landsat archives contain nearly one million scenes and films, and additional "data will still be available from U. S. allies' satellites," he said.

Defense Dept. has not been willing to financially support Landsat, and other users have not stated strongly enough that the data are needed, he said, citing some of the reasons against continuing Landsat. Demand for Landsat products has not developed, he said. According to Wright, the Commerce Dept. has submitted "confusing" proposals that have too many technical changes and appeared likely to result in cost overruns.

Wright said he hopes the private sector will step forward and fund a Landsat system. OMB came under attack during the hearing for backing away from its \$250-million commitment to Eosat, the company that was selected by the Commerce Dept. to privatize the Landsat system.

Data Continuity

Rep. James Scheuer (D.-N. Y.), chairman of the House subcommittee on natural resources, agriculture research and the environment, said the congressional consensus is that a two-satellite system is "an indispensable necessity to preserve continuity of data flow."

Eosat's proposed Landsat follow-on system has changed technically several times since the contract was awarded. Eosat submitted a new proposal and additional costs in February. Commerce Dept. officials testified that the contract may have to be recompeted as a result.

The latest Eosat proposal called for two satellites based on the Tiros weather satellite bus, a switch from the current contract that includes use of the large, serviceable Omnistar spacecraft. The satellites would be launched on Titan 2 launch vehicles, not the space shuttle. A West Coast shuttle or Titan 4 launch would have been required for the Omnistar plat-

form. While the shuttle may not be available from the West Coast, Titan 4s are considered to be too expensive for the program. The new satellites will cost \$296.8 million, nearly \$50 million more than the original contract, and be launched about 18 months later than first planned.

Clarence Brown, deputy secretary of the Commerce Dept., cited four factors that have affected Landsat commercialization this year:

- The unwillingness of the private sector users and Eosat to share in financing the program.
- Increasing budget deficit reduction pressures.
- Increasing costs associated with reduced shuttle launch capability following last year's accident.
- Competition with the French and Japanese.

Rep. George Brown (D.-Calif.) said he fears that the U. S. will be bypassed very quickly by the Japanese, French or a multinational consortium in remote sensing. Other nations can be expected to launch satellites with 1-meter resolution or real-time data flow. "We're going to be dead in the water," he said.

During the hearing, questions were raised on whether the Eosat concept was the best possible in the face of increased international competition. "We may be in a position where we have to renegotiate or recompete under procurement law because we're seeing technology change and the competition move faster," Commerce's Brown said. "Maybe we aren't in the game" with the Eosat plan, he said. □